

12/21/2009 This Week in Congress

This Week in Congress

December 21, 2009

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." The House of Representatives concluded its work for the year on Wednesday and will not reconvene until January 12, 2010. During this time, I will be traveling across the state to meet with Kansans and get my marching orders for 2010. I wish you and your family a peaceful and joy-filled Christmas and a happy New Year. The next edition of "This Week in Congress" will be Monday, January 4, 2010.

Update on Health Care Reform

On Saturday, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid unveiled his 383 page manager's amendment to H.R. 3590, the Senate's health care reform legislation. The Senate voted 60-40 early this morning to cut off debate on a manager's amendment to sweeping healthcare legislation, clearing the way for final passage on Christmas Eve.

I oppose Senator Reid's "compromise" plan. I am concerned that the only thing this plan will compromise is Kansans' access to health care. This bill would turn our health care system on its head and gamble with millions of American lives and one-sixth of our economy. My greatest disappointment with these developments is the crass, unprincipled actions of elected officials. It appears that senators have obtained special treatment and favors in return for their votes. Congress should be about developing good public policy - not a place where votes are garnered in return for political favors. To vote for a plan because of promises and preferential treatment is wrong and irresponsible. I am also opposed to provisions in the Senate plan that would reverse more than 30 years of federal law banning the government funding of abortion. I am deeply disappointed that Senate Democrats ignored the loud bipartisan message from the House that expressly prohibited federal funding of abortions in health care reform legislation. [Click here to read my full statement explaining my opposition to this plan.](#)

If the Senate passes a reform measure by Christmas, the bill still must go to a conference committee of senators and members of the House of Representatives, which passed H.R. 3962, Speaker Pelosi's health care reform bill, on November 7th without my support.

EPA Action Must Be Stopped

The December 7th Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulation allows the agency to put limits on greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act without the consent of Congress. I introduced legislation this week to rescind this EPA rule that said carbon dioxide and five other greenhouse gases are a danger to public health and welfare.

The Clean Air Act was never intended to regulate greenhouse gases. The EPA must be stopped from making decisions that circumvent Congress and are not supported by law. Proceeding with this rule would have devastating effects on the economy, as EPA-imposed regulations would prove more costly than the cap and trade bill I opposed in June. With the highest unemployment in a quarter century, the last thing Kansans need is more bureaucratic red tape and fees that would destroy more jobs. [Click here to learn more about my legislation, H.J.Res. 66, to invalidate this harmful EPA rule.](#)

Terrorists Do Not Belong in the U.S.

The Obama Administration announced this week that the federal government would purchase an under-used prison in northwestern Illinois to house terrorist detainees it plans to transfer from Guantanamo Bay. The plan to move terrorists from Guantanamo Bay to the U.S. makes no sense. The decision not only threatens the safety of Americans, but the President is also asking taxpayers to foot the bill. Initial reports indicate the cost to acquire and upgrade the facility in Illinois will be anywhere from \$120 to \$250 million. It would then cost taxpayers another \$65 to \$85 million a year to operate. I will oppose any efforts to authorize or fund this misguided and expensive decision.

I have opposed moving terrorists to the U.S. since the President made this pledge and have sponsored legislation to prohibit terrorists from being brought to our country. While I am pleased the Kansas congressional delegation was successful in preventing the transfer of terrorists to Leavenworth, I continue to believe the best place for these dangerous individuals is in Guantanamo Bay.

Working to Help Disabled Veterans Achieve Independent Living

We have an obligation to care for those wounded in service to our country. This week, I introduced legislation that will help more disabled veterans modify their homes to achieve independent living following injuries sustained during military service. The Specially Adapted Housing Assistance Enhancement Act, H.R. 4319, would improve an important Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) grant program that assists veterans with disabilities in the construction or modification of homes to meet their mobility needs. By expanding eligibility for the program, the legislation will help more severely injured service members and veterans who face great challenges to live easier, more independent lives in the comfort of their homes.

In addition to expanding eligibility for adapted housing grants, the legislation would also create a pilot program to encourage the use of adapted housing grants for disabled service members residing temporarily in housing owned by a family member. [Click here for more information about the Specially Adapted Housing Grant Program.](#) [Click here to read more about the legislation I authored.](#)

Sponsoring Legislation to Promote Jobs and Business Opportunities for Veterans

One in ten Americans are currently without work and many of them are veterans. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported recently that over one million veterans were unemployed during the month of November. More must be done to address this record rate of unemployment for all Americans and especially for those who have made great sacrifices for our country.

I recently joined Republican members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs in introducing legislation to improve veterans' opportunities to earn a living in this challenging economy. The Promoting Jobs for Veterans Act, H.R. 4220, will help veterans find employment by providing funding and incentives for them to pursue employment training and education. The bill will also offer a monthly stipend to veterans who are new teachers and are teaching in a rural area. Additionally, this legislation expands opportunities within the federal government for veteran-owned small businesses.

House Votes to Sanction Iran

New reports this week revealed the existence of secret Iranian plans to develop another part of a nuclear weapon. As I have been explaining to my colleagues, Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons threatens the safety of American troops in the

region; is a threat to Israel's existence; emboldens terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah; and could lead to a dangerous nuclear arms race in the Middle East.

To counter this growing threat, I supported passage of the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act this week, which would block access to U.S. markets for companies that choose to do business in Iran. Although Iran has a wealth of oil, it lacks the ability to turn much of that oil into fuel. As a result, it imports about 40 percent of its gasoline. By targeting this vulnerability, we may be able to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions. [Click here to watch my remarks in support of this legislation.](#)

Pharmacy Program will Train More Pharmacists in Kansas

I visited the pharmacy at Salina Regional Health Center (SRHC) on Friday to learn about plans to implement a post-graduate pharmacy residency program that will allow pharmacy college graduates to complete a one-year residency program in Salina before practicing on their own. If graduates complete a residency in Kansas, they are much more likely to stay and practice in our state. This is especially important as eight Kansas counties are currently without a pharmacist.

In addition to learning about the residency program and discussing the importance of recruiting pharmacists to rural areas, I also got an inside view of how medications are distributed and administered throughout the hospital. I also visited with hospital staff about health care reform and training pharmacist technicians. With the goal of patient safety, SRHC has given extensive training to all of its pharmacist technicians and they have all been certified by the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board. Thank you to Linda Radke, Steve Romans and other members of the hospital staff for meeting with me.

Working to Support Kansas Pharmacies and the Patients they Serve

This week, I worked on some initiatives to preserve Kansans' access to prescription drugs and important medical supplies. As co-founder of the Congressional Community Pharmacy Coalition, I understand that the relationship between pharmacists and patients is a vital component of our health care delivery system.

- Fixing Medicaid Generic Prescription Reimbursement - I urged my House colleagues to join me in requesting that Congress fix Medicaid reimbursement rates for generic prescriptions in any final health care reform legislation. Even though I oppose the reform proposals currently before Congress, I believe that Congress needs to set an accurate pharmacy reimbursement benchmark in order to support Kansas pharmacies and ensure patient access to life-saving, cost-effective prescription medicines. The current benchmark, known as Average Manufacturers Price (AMP), is insufficient to cover pharmacies' Medicaid prescription costs and could force pharmacies out of business. Kansans depend on their pharmacists for information and counseling to ensure that they receive quality medicines, products, and medical services.

- Preserving Seniors' Access to Medical Supplies - I requested that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) extend its deadline to enforce burdensome federal regulations affecting Kansas pharmacies. Beginning January 1, 2010, pharmacies will be required to have completed a lengthy and costly accreditation process in order to provide diabetes testing supplies and other medical equipment. As a result of these new regulations, many pharmacies may have to surrender their right to provide this equipment to patients, leaving Medicare beneficiaries access to care for these supplies and services at their local pharmacies. Especially in our rural areas, where pharmacies are long distances apart, this resulting limitation of access is particularly troubling. In October, I sponsored H.R. 3663, legislation that was signed into law that provided for a three month delay of the implementation of these requirements. Unfortunately, many pharmacies are still struggling to achieve the needed accreditation, and any changes to these accreditation requirements addressed in proposed health care reform legislation will not be implemented prior to the January 1st deadline.

Visiting EIDorado National in Salina

After visiting the pharmacy at Salina Regional Health Center on Friday, I toured EIDorado National in Salina. EIDorado

National started building commercial buses in 1979 and has since grown to be the largest producer of mid-sized commercial buses in North America. In the Salina manufacturing facility, Eldorado National can take a bare truck chassis and custom build a body and outfit it to the specifications given by a customer. The company also makes standard minivans compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. I was glad to have the opportunity to tour the facility, see busy employees at work and hear that the company has backorders. Thank you to Denny Foerschler, Jeff Montgomery and others who took the time to give me a tour.

From Washington to Home: Big First Listening Tour Continues

My Big First Listening Tour will continue tomorrow with town hall meetings in Greeley and Wichita Counties. Next week, I will conclude my listening tour, "From Washington to Home," with stops in Stanton, Grant, Kearny, Hamilton and Marshall Counties. The conversations I have with Kansans during these town hall meetings give me direction in Washington, D.C. The remaining listening tour schedule is below:

Tuesday, December 22, 2009

Greeley County Tour Stop, Tribune

Time: 10:30 to 11:30 AM CST (9:30 to 10:30 AM MST)

Location: Senior Center

Address: 410 Broadway

Wichita County Tour Stop, Leoti

Time: Noon to 1:00 PM

Location: Atkinson Senior Center

Address: 110 S. Indian Road

Monday, December 28, 2009

Stanton County Tour Stop, Johnson City

Time: 8:00 to 9:00 AM

Location: Stanton County Courthouse

Address: 201 North Main

Grant County Tour Stop, Ulysses

Time: 10:15 to 11:15 AM

Location: Grant County Senior Center

Address: 117 East Grant Avenue

Kearny County Tour Stop, Lakin

Time: 12:30 to 1:00 PM

Location: Scotty's Café

Address: 5050 East Santa Fe Trail Boulevard

Hamilton County Tour Stop, Syracuse

Time: 1:45 to 2:45 PM CST (12:45 to 1:45 PM MST)

Location: Hamilton County Farm Bureau

Address: 105 North Main Street

Tuesday, December 29, 2009

Marshall County Tour Stop, Home

Time: 11:00 AM to Noon

Location: Blue Valley Tele-Communications

Address: 1559 Pony Express Highway

[Click here to see where I have already stopped this year.](#)

In the Office

Larry and Edie Dahlsten of Lindsborg, Steve Baccus of Minneapolis, Harry Watts of Manhattan and Terry Holdren of Topeka were in with the Kansas Farm Bureau to discuss the adverse effects cap and trade would have on agriculture. Robert and Kathy Bangerter of Leoti came by my Washington, D.C., office to receive a tour of the United States Capitol.

Very truly yours,

Jerry